

**PLANT PROTECTION AND QUARANTINE**  
**TWO-LEVEL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROGRAM**

**1. PURPOSE**

This Directive establishes a 2-level performance appraisal program, also known as a “pass/fail” system, for certain employees of Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). In this appraisal program, two summary levels (Office of Personnel Management (OPM) summary level pattern A) are used to rate overall performance, and two performance levels also are used to rate individual performance elements.

This appraisal program was requested by PPQ, and has been approved by the Department’s Office of Human Resources Management.

**2. COVERAGE, EFFECTIVE DATE, AND MINIMUM APPRAISAL PERIOD**

a. Coverage. This 2-level performance appraisal program applies to the following PPQ employees (except those excluded by law, regulation, or an administrative determination by OPM):

- (1) All employees who are not in a bargaining unit with an exclusive representative recognized by the Federal Labor Relations Authority;
- (2) Employees whose recognized exclusive representative is the National Association of PPQ Office Support Employees; and
- (3) Employees whose recognized exclusive representative is the National Federation of Federal Employees, Local 376.

Employees whose exclusive representative is the National Association of Agriculture Employees are covered by a different performance appraisal system.

b. Effective Date. January 7, 2000.

c. Minimum Appraisal Period. 60 days.

### 3. AUTHORITIES

This 2-level appraisal program is authorized by, and meets the requirements of:

- a. Title 5, United States Code, Chapter 43.
- b. Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 430.
- c. U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Performance Management System, as approved by OPM on January 31, 1996, and the Secretary of Agriculture on June 12, 1996.

### 4. POLICY

- a. It is Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) policy to develop and operate performance appraisal programs tailored to meet the needs of agencies and their subcomponents, in a manner which is consistent with applicable statutes, regulations, and the principles and objectives of the USDA system.
- b. Agency heads and delegated managers may initiate new performance appraisal programs, changes in program coverage, and changes to the specific procedures and requirements of performance appraisal programs for their organizations, within the parameters of the USDA system. These include:
  - (1) The starting and ending dates of the annual appraisal cycle,
  - (2) The minimum rating period,
  - (3) How many and which performance levels will be used to appraise performance elements,
  - (4) The summary level pattern, and
  - (5) The method for deriving and assigning the summary level for the rating of record.

**Departmental approval is required before new programs, changes in program coverage, or changes in items 2 through 5 above, can be implemented.**

- c. The success of performance appraisal programs will be measured by the extent to which they:
  - (1) Support the Department's missions and customer service philosophy;

- (2) Support and adhere to the Department's civil rights and diversity policies, recognize civil rights and diversity accomplishments, and improve management of a diverse workforce;
  - (3) Align individual and team performance expectations with organizational strategic plans, including performance goals and objectives;
  - (4) Provide for employee performance evaluation which focuses on results and objective measures of performance;
  - (5) Provide for employee involvement in the performance appraisal process;
  - (6) Use the appraisal process as a tool to improve continuous two-way communication of organizational, team, and employee performance objectives and accomplishments;
  - (7) Improve organizational, team, and individual performance;
  - (8) Reward organizational, team, and individual performance through traditional and innovative uses of recognition; and
  - (9) Promote the use of streamlining techniques such as automation and paperwork reduction to make the performance appraisal process more efficient.
- d. The provisions of performance appraisal programs will be communicated to all covered employees through discussions between supervisors and employees, training, and/or orientation and informational materials, when appropriate.

## **5. RESPONSIBILITIES**

- a. Employees will:
- (1) Participate with the rating official in developing elements and standards for the annual performance plan;
  - (2) Ensure they have a clear understanding of their performance expectations, and request clarification, as necessary;
  - (3) Manage performance to achieve identified goals;
  - (4) Seek feedback from the rating official; and

- (5) Take action to improve aspects of performance identified as not meeting expectations.
- b. Rating officials (first-line supervisors or other officials with authority to issue performance plans and ratings) will:
- (1) Develop performance elements and standards, with employee input, and document them in the written annual performance plan.
  - (2) Monitor employee performance during the appraisal period and communicate with employees regularly about their performance;
  - (3) Conduct at least one mid-term progress review with each employee;
  - (4) Assist employees in improving performance, and work more closely with any employee whose performance is identified as not meeting expectations;
  - (5) Appraise each employee's performance at the end of the appraisal cycle (or at other times when a rating of record is required), conduct an end-of-year performance review, and issue the annual rating of record; and
  - (6) Take appropriate action for employees whose performance does not meet expectations, and recognize employees, as appropriate, for successful performance.
- c. Reviewing officials will review and approve the rating of record for any employee whose performance is rated unacceptable.
- d. The Director, MRP Human Resources, will:
- (1) Design performance appraisal programs at the direction of Agency heads and delegated managers;
  - (2) Obtain Departmental approval, when required by Departmental policy, for new performance appraisal programs and for changes in program procedures, requirements, or coverage;
  - (3) Make informational materials and operating guidance available to supervisors and employees; and
  - (4) Periodically evaluate performance appraisal programs.

## 6. REQUIREMENTS

- a. Annual Appraisal Period. In most cases, the appraisal cycle will cover a 12-month period, and each employee will receive an annual rating of record at the end of the cycle. The Agency head or delegated manager sets the beginning and ending dates of the annual appraisal period. If an Agency or subcomponent changes these dates, affected employees will be notified in writing.
- b. Establishing Performance Plans. A written performance plan will be provided to each covered employee at the beginning of each appraisal period (normally within 30 days). The performance plan includes the dates of the appraisal period, and performance elements and standards.

(1) Performance Elements.

- (a) Each performance plan will include at least one critical element based on the employee's work assignments and responsibilities. If appropriate, individual contributions to team or unit performance may be covered. Weighting of elements is not an issue in a 2-level performance appraisal program.
- (b) Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights Content. As required by Departmental policy, all supervisors will have a separate critical element on equal opportunity/civil rights. For non-supervisory employees, performance expectations for civil rights will be included in a performance element, but it need not be a stand-alone element.
- (c) Non-critical elements will not be used.
- (d) "Additional" elements may be used, but are not used to determine the summary level for the rating of record.

- (2) Performance Standards. Performance in each critical element is rated at one of two levels, "fully successful" (equivalent to OPM level 3) or "unacceptable" (equivalent to level 1). For each element, the performance standard must be written at the "fully successful" level. The absence of a written standard at the "unacceptable" level will not preclude the assignment of an element rating at that level.

- (a) The “fully successful” level generally describes the performance of a solid, effective employee whose work meets or exceeds normal expectations in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and customer service.
  - (b) The “unacceptable” level is described as performance which fails to meet the performance standards at the “fully successful” level.
- (3) Employees are encouraged to participate in the development of performance elements and standards, to review them at least annually, and to make suggestions for changes.
- (4) Changes to Performance Plans. A new or revised performance plan will be issued, as necessary, if an employee is assigned to a different position, or if his/her major duties or responsibilities change during the appraisal period. This includes temporary changes in duties due to a detail or temporary promotion, if the temporary assignment is expected to last as long as the minimum rating period. Changes to performance plans must be communicated in writing to the employee.

c. Monitoring Performance.

- (1) Progress Reviews. During the appraisal period, at least one mid-term progress review will be conducted with each employee to discuss his/her performance compared to the performance plan.
- (2) Unacceptable Performance.
  - (a) Performance Improvement Plan. If, at any time during the appraisal cycle, an employee’s performance is determined to be “unacceptable” in one or more critical elements, the employee will be given a written performance improvement plan and an opportunity to demonstrate “fully successful” performance. The performance improvement plan will include:
    - 1 Notice to the employee that his/her performance is unacceptable;
    - 2 The element(s) in which performance is unacceptable;
    - 3 What the employee must do to demonstrate acceptable performance;

- 4 The specific assistance that will be provided to help the employee;
- 5 The timeframe of the performance improvement period; and
- 6 The actions that may be initiated if the performance does not improve to the fully successful level.

- (b) Failure to Demonstrate Fully Successful Performance. If the employee has not improved performance to the acceptable level during the opportunity period, action will be initiated to reassign, reduce in grade, or remove the employee.
- (c) Savings Provision. Administrative actions initiated against employees whose performance is “unacceptable” under 5 U.S.C. 4303 and an approved Agency performance appraisal system in effect prior to the effective date of this program, will continue to be processed consistent with that preestablished set of procedures and requirements.

d. Rating Performance.

- (1) Eligibility for Rating. To be eligible for a rating of record, an employee must have worked under a performance plan for at least the minimum rating period. If necessary, the appraisal period will be extended until the minimum rating period has been met, before a rating of record is issued.
- (2) Rating of Record.
  - (a) A written rating of record will be issued to each employee as soon as practicable after the end of the appraisal period, normally within 30 days. The rating of record consists of ratings for each element in the performance plan, and the assignment of a summary rating level.
  - (b) Assignment of Element Ratings. The rating official will appraise the employee’s performance against the performance standards for each element, and rate each element as “fully successful” or “unacceptable.”
  - (c) Derivation and Assignment of Summary Level. If all critical elements are rated “fully successful,” the summary rating level is “fully successful.”

If any critical element is rated “unacceptable,” the summary rating

level is “unacceptable.”

- (d) If an element is rated “unacceptable,” the rating official must prepare a written statement describing the employee’s deficiencies in the element, compared to the “fully successful” standard. An “unacceptable” rating of record must be reviewed by a higher level official before it is issued to the employee.
- (e) Consistency with Within-Grade Increase (WGI) Determinations. An employee must have a rating of record of “fully successful” to be granted a WGI. The rating of record must be “unacceptable” if the WGI is to be denied. When a decision to grant or withhold a WGI is inconsistent with the employee’s most recent rating of record, a more current rating of record must be prepared.

e. Advisory Ratings.

An employee may receive one or more advisory ratings during an appraisal cycle. Any advisory ratings received by an employee will be considered by the rating official when preparing a rating of record. An advisory rating is not, in itself, a rating of record.

- (1) Details and Temporary Promotions. An advisory rating will be prepared for any detail or temporary promotion which lasts as long as the minimum rating period. The supervisor will document the employee’s accomplishments and forward the information to the employee’s permanent rating official.
- (2) Change of Position. If an employee has worked under a performance plan for at least the minimum rating period, and then moves to a position with a different rating official, the losing rating official will prepare an advisory rating and forward it to the new rating official.

## **7. PERFORMANCE BONUSES**

Performance bonuses include the lump-sum cash performance award and the Quality Step Increase (QSI), which are intended to recognize and reward good performance throughout the rating cycle. To be eligible for a performance bonus under this 2-level performance appraisal program, an employee must receive a “fully successful” rating of record.



- a. Lump-Sum Performance Bonuses. A written justification is required to support a lump-sum performance award over \$500.
- b. QSI's. To initiate a QSI, the recommending supervisor must prepare a written justification that specifically describes:
  - (1) The expected work results of the employee;
  - (2) The actual results achieved and their linkage to established goals;
  - (3) How the employee substantially exceeded his/her performance standards and any specific work goals; and
  - (4) How the employee's performance was sustained at such a high level through the appraisal period.

## **8. INQUIRIES**

- a. Inquiries on policy determinations, new performance appraisal programs, and changes in program procedures or coverage should be referred to MRP Human Resources, Program Development.
- b. Inquiries on operational aspects, including the development of performance elements and standards, should be directed to the servicing Employee Relations Specialist.

- c. Operating guidance and informational materials on how to implement performance appraisal programs is contained in the Internet-based Human Resources Desk Guide, Chapter 4430, Employee Performance Appraisal. The Guide is intended to be a user-friendly reference tool to be shared by supervisors and employees. The Guide may be viewed at: [www.aphis.usda.gov/mb/mrphr/hrdg.html](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mb/mrphr/hrdg.html), on the Information Technology home page at [www.usda.gov/library](http://www.usda.gov/library), and on the AMS Administrative Issuances home page at [www.ams.usda.gov/issuances](http://www.ams.usda.gov/issuances).

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